

For immediate release

STAN DOUGLAS

Midcentury Studio

March 23 – April 23, 2011

Opening reception: Wednesday, March 23, 6–8 PM

Press preview with the artist: 5 PM



Suspect, 2010.

David Zwirner is pleased to present an exhibition of new work by Stan Douglas, on view at the 525 and 533 West 19th Street gallery spaces.

Since the late 1980s, Douglas has created films, photographs, and installations that reexamine particular locations or past events. His works often take their points of departure in local settings, from which broader issues can be identified. Making frequent use of new as well as outdated technologies, Douglas appropriates existing Hollywood genres (including murder mysteries and the Western) and borrows from classic literary works (notably Samuel Beckett, Herman Melville, and Franz Kafka) to create ready-made contextual frameworks for his complex, thoroughly researched projects.

Douglas's films, which are often randomly looped and may take days to unfold, defy straightforward expectations of narrative and authorship, while his photographs—sometimes heavily digitally retouched—deliberately eschew a linear reading. Examining the contrasts that exist between personal, subjective impressions of a given place or past event and the prevailing, "official" representation of the same location or occurrence, Douglas rethinks linguistic and aesthetic structures while at the same time grounding his works in specific material or political circumstances.

This exhibition debuts an extensive project by Douglas that chronicles the burgeoning discipline of press photography in North America during the postwar period. Douglas has assumed the role of a fictional, anonymous photographer to create a series of images hypothetically produced between 1945-1951. To do so, he constructed a veritable "midcentury studio" using authentic equipment as well as actors to produce carefully staged, black-and-white photographs that painstakingly emulate the period's obsession with drama, "caught-in-the-moment" crime-scenes, curious and exotic artifacts, magicians, fashion, dance, gambling, and technology.

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Douglas's midcentury alter-ego revokes the career of the legendary photographer Arthur Fellig, also known as Weegee (1899-1968). Self-taught, Weegee typically photographed at night, always using the same heavy camera, exposure time, and flash; he is particularly known for his documentation of the New York nightscape in the years surrounding the Second World War. In addition, Douglas also refers to the relatively unknown work of Raymond Munro, a Canadian war veteran who became a photojournalist without any photographic education or experience, and to the New York-based Black Star photo agency founded in the mid-1930s (whose archives are now housed at Ryerson University in Toronto), which frequently employed photographers with little formal training, but nonetheless came to influence the field of photographic reportage for many decades.

Douglas's black-and-white photographs offer a fragmentary portrait of the immediate postwar period in North America. They include the disturbingly casual scene of a murder victim freshly covered by the daily papers; a fight in the stands of a hockey stadium; close-up, detailed guides for how to throw a cricket ball and steal a wristwatch; a programmatic image of a dancer's movements captured with the help of a strobe light; and a trio of men gambling in a doorway over a game of dice. Starkly lit, dark shadows and areas of black dominate most of the images, whether or not they are nighttime shots. Douglas was specifically fascinated by those elements of the image that are beyond the photographer's control, and while his artificial lighting and staged compositions are evidently at odds with the desire for spontaneity expressed by the midcentury practitioners, many of the artist's works have an unexpected, uncanny dimension secondary to their immediate subject matter.

A fully illustrated catalogue, edited by Tommy Simoens, will be published by Ludion Press on the occasion of the show, featuring an introduction to *Midcentury Studio* by the artist and essays by Christopher Phillips and Pablo Sigg.

Born in Vancouver in 1960, **Stan Douglas** has been the subject of numerous solo and group exhibitions at prominent institutions worldwide. Recent venues have included the ZKM/Museum für Neue Kunst, Karlsruhe, Germany (*Fast Forward 2: The Power of Motion*, 2010); the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York (*Haunted: Contemporary Photography/Video/Performance*, 2010); the International Center of Photography, New York (*3rd ICP Triennial of Photography and Video: Dress Codes*, 2009 and *Archive Fever: Uses of the Document in Contemporary Art*, 2008); the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, Washington, D.C. (*The Cinema Effect: Illusion, Reality, and the Moving Image, Part I: Dreams*, 2008); the Staatsgalerie Stuttgart and Württembergischer Kunstverein, Stuttgart (2007, solo); the Centre Georges Pompidou, Paris (*Samuel Beckett*, 2007); The Studio Museum in Harlem, New York (2005, solo); and kestnergesellschaft, Hanover (2004, solo).

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